

March 4, 2021

Good Afternoon Senator Haskell, Representative Elliot, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,

My name is Elizabeth Keefe, and I am an English Professor in the First-Year Studies department at Gateway Community College.

I am here in support of **HB6402**, a Study of Higher Education Issues in the State (with the recommended substitute language change) and **HB 6404**, Funding of Debt Free College (PACT). As noted in the text of HB6402 : *"The study shall include consideration of **measures of student success**, the relative cost of administration, and the effectiveness of **communication, governance**, and the setting of **budgetary priorities** between the Board of Regents and the 17 educational institutions."*

I speak, in particular, to the issue of **measures of student success** and the ways in which the "Students First" "one college" plan does not serve our students and, in fact, is doing a disservice to our most disenfranchised population. **The new "Students First" plan will place all incoming college students directly into college-level math and English courses with support services such as tutoring and supplemental non-credit bearing supports that have yet to be determined.** This model has been proposed, as many of my colleagues have argued, without evidence of effectiveness and by using faulty, careless research. There is no precedent for this drastic change. This newly proposed education structure removes the intensive supports that students need to close the gaps in their learning deficits. In was only in 2013, not that long ago, that the PA 12-40 law mandated that students be placed on an accelerated track to allow them to complete their college entry-level English or math courses by the end of their first year. These curricular changes were put in place to streamline student completion, and they have had some success. However, these PA 12-40 rules have been sidelined for new "one college" model where **all** students place into college-level courses regardless of their skill level, and the support that they receive may not be from faculty but from EAs or part-time tutors. A concern of many faculty who have been working on the PA 12-40 reforms is that the new ENG 101 placement model violates the PA 12-40 developmental support law. I urge the committee to study this concern of a possible violation to the existing PA 12-40 law.

Educators know that placing underprepared students into college courses will increase failure rates and decrease student success. Students achieve when they are adequately supported and appropriately placed in an institution that values their **uniqueness and their educational histories**. Community colleges have historically done just that, but in the future, with the removal of developmental education, this will not be true.

The reason for these sweeping changes to eliminate developmental education are, in the words of the System Office's Accelerated math and English placement policy, "designed to be anti-racist, eliminate structural inequalities, identify and address implicit biases, and promote equitable course completion" (ACME Committee Report, June 2020). In reality, the new model

removes the supports that are designed to increase equity among students who have been educationally disenfranchised.

These inequities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and students in future semesters will have more significant learning gaps resulting from online learning. What would really be beneficial for our students would be **PACT funding that applies to developmental courses**. Learning gaps that students bring with them to our campuses cannot be closed through acceleration and hasty so-called supports.

My colleagues will share stories about particular students who, through hard work, perseverance and grit, managed to succeed at some level because of the skills they learned in developmental English and math classes. Many of my own students were grateful for the opportunity to become confident readers, writers, and critical thinkers, and for many of these students, this took several semesters of arduous work. **Acquiring language skills does not happen overnight, nor does repairing long-standing learning deficits that students bring with them to our colleges**. The focus of the BOR is to supposedly to save time and money for our students, but this plan will leave many of our community college students behind and truncate opportunities for success.

This HB6402 study bill is necessary to scrutinize Connecticut's higher education policies that are affected by the one-college merger. As many of my colleagues know, decisions have been made sloppily, without adequate consultation with or respect for faculty or our students.

We must invest time, research, and funding into our students' education and **not** into a top-heavy administration that is far-removed from the first-year community college classroom. We must work to ensure truly successful outcomes for our diverse student population and a better future for Connecticut higher education.

Thank you for your time.